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Lexical and Grammatical Features of Jamaican Patois  
in Reggae Music

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## **Abstract**

Creole languages show the variable nature of language. They provide evidence of universal sociolinguistic reality of language contact and economy. This work observes such nature of one of the most significant creole languages, Jamaican Creole, or Jamaican Patois (Patwa). The aim of this thesis is to provide an overview of lexical and grammatical features of Jamaican Creole in reggae music, to establish the importance of language in the formation of Jamaican culture and identity, and to indicate the role of historical language stereotypes in the formation of negative language attitudes. The first part of the thesis contains a diachronically-oriented theoretical research. Referring mostly to secondary literature, the emphasis is on the importance of the historical aspect in the creation of the current social condition of Patois and its role in the formation of the Jamaican culture and identity. The second part contains qualitative investigation of lexical and grammatical features, conducted on a randomly selected corpus of 53 modern reggae lyrics, in order to establish the difference between Standard English, Standard Jamaican English, and the overall Jamaican Creole continuum, as well as to confirm the linguistic autonomy of Jamaican Creole in relation to the British and Jamaican Standard.

**Key words:** colonialism, language attitudes, creolization, linguistic continuum, reggae music.

## **Sažetak**

Kreolski jezici vidljiv su pokazatelj promjenjive prirode jezika. Dokaz su postojanja opće sociolingvističke stvarnosti jezičnog kontakta te jezične ekonomije. Ovaj rad razmatra jezičnu prirodu jamajačkog kreola, jednog od najznačajnijih kreolskih jezika, zvanog još i Jamaican Patois (Patwa). Cilj rada jest prikazati leksička i gramatička obilježja jamajačkog kreola u reggae glazbi, utvrditi važnost jezika pri formiranju jamajačke kulture i identiteta te ukazati na ulogu povijesno uvjetovanih jezičnih stereotipa pri stvaranju negativnih jezičnih stavova. Prvi dio rada sadržavat će dijakronijski orijentirano teoretsko istraživanje. Oslanjajući se na sekundarnu literaturu, naglasak je stavljen na važnost povijesnog aspekta u formiranju današnjeg društvenog statusa Patois jezika i njegove važnosti pri stvaranju jamajačke kulture i identiteta. Drugi dio sastoji se od kvalitativnog istraživanja leksičkih i gramatičkih svojstava u nasumično odabranom korpusu 53 teksta suvremene reggae glazbe.

Cilj kvalitativnog istraživanja jest ustanoviti razliku između standardnog engleskog, standardnog jamajačkog engleskog jezika te cjelokupnog kreolskog kontinuuma, kao i potvrditi jezičnu autonomiju jamajačkog kreola u usporedbi s britanskim i jamajačkim standardom.

**Ključne riječi:** kolonijalizam, jezični stavovi, kreolizacija, lingvistički kontinuum, reggae glazba.

## 1 Introduction

Spoken language is a means of communication primarily characterized by its inconstant nature. It is prone to changes such as simplification of language, its creation, maintenance, language death or language mixing. In order for any of these changes to occur, it is indispensable for a language to be in some kind of direct or indirect contact with other ones. Creation of a new, mixed language, a change that will be discussed here, reflects daily coexistence of more different languages in one territory. The basic need for communication, historically conditioned by trade, slavery or colonialism, requires the creation of a *lingua franca*. Such kind of contact between two or more structurally different language varieties can become the cause for the creation of a new, mixed and to a large extent simplified language. This process is called *pidginization*. As Wells (1982: 562) implies, the term *pidgin* denotes a simplified form of communication among people who speak different languages, but have no other language in common. One of the languages usually provides basic grammar and simplified syntax, while the other one serves as the source for basic lexical and morphological input, manifested through borrowing and subsequent phonological adaptation. The most important feature of pidgins, however, is that their purpose for existence is usually short-termed. Since they are not native languages, once the period of colonization, slavery or trade is over, and there is no need for further contact, pidgins are usually destined to disappear. Nevertheless, some of them become native and get gradually transformed into structurally more complex, creole languages. Wells (1982: 562-563) asserts that *creolization* is defined as process in which a pidgin becomes first, and possibly the only language in a speech community. Unlike a pidgin, a creole language is more elaborated since it is used for everyday purpose. Although the processes of pidginization and creolization are clearly distinct by their definition, a line between them is rather obscure in reality. Simmons (2010: 319) classifies creoles by placing them into three typological groups. The first type refers to cultural and racial mixture of people, while the second one defines creoles as second languages which have become the first upon the emergence of a new generation. The last type presupposes creoles to be “reflections of a natural bioprogramme for human language which is activated in cases of imperfect language transmission” (Simmons, 2010: 319). This view emphasizes the importance of restricted language input. Hymes (1971: 3) suggests that both pidgins and creoles are not only linguistically reduced adaptations, but are also sociolinguistically “marginal, in the circumstances of their origin, and in the attitudes towards

them on the part of those who speak one of the languages from which they derive” (Hymes, 1971: 3). The author underlines the importance of linguistic stereotypes, according to which a pidgin is considered a “baby-talk version of another language” (Hymes, 1971: 3).

Due to negative prejudicial attitudes towards such products of linguistic creativity, pidgins and creoles have been often studied as deviations from the “correct” system of a superposed, prestigious language. As Hymes implies (1971: 3), this posture is the result of the colonialist ideology, where anyone who is different from socially high-positioned colonizers, is convinced to have deserved inferior status. Thus, the process of creolization becomes significant, not only from the linguistic point of view, but from the sociological one as well. In addition, Patrick (2003: 610) suggests that creolization leads to the production of new cultural and social institutions. However, the attitude towards minority language in these institutions continues to undermine its value, even in present days. Therefore, Simmons (2010: 319) asserts the historical inferiority of pidgins and creoles “merits revision” since both colonizer and colonized spoke them, due to the lack of a common language. Accordingly, consequences can be seen on educational and economical systems, language planning, and overall language recognition and identity.

## 2 Nature and origin of Jamaican Creole

The varieties spoken in the Caribbean region are known as West Indian, or Caribbean English, and are referred to as varieties of the Internationally Accepted English (IAE). They share certain phonological, morphological, and grammatical features which differentiate them from the international English. According to Simmons (2010: 316-317) on the one hand, West Indian English is placed in the same “box” with Australian, Canadian and British English, despite the significant differences. This is a general statement, since the author’s criterion in this case is the universal language intelligibility. Hymes (1971: 350), on the other hand, holds that even some varieties of Jamaican English can be diverse to the point of mutual unintelligibility. Therefore, one must take into consideration that not all of the varieties of West Indian English are equally intelligible in relation to the international English, and the level of understanding often depends on geographical and social factors. The author, however, does raise the question of the term “Englishes” and distinguishes “standard” English (British English), and “English”, that is, the postcolonial version of British English (Hymes, 1971: 317). When it comes to defining Jamaican Creole, confusion starts at the very beginning. Jettka (2010: 2) states that, until present days, many negative connotations were hidden under numerous names for this language. In formal context accepted name is Jamaican Creole, but there is a whole range of assigned names, which mostly include Jamaican Patwa, or Patois, Creole English, Bongo Talk, broken English etc. The name *Patois* derives from French “rough speech”. The term *Creole*, on the other hand, originally meant “island born”, and was used to refer to whites, as well as Negroes, only gradually acquiring negative connotations (Cassidy, 2007: 21).

Since language development is directly connected to social and political circumstances, it is quite important to define certain periods in Jamaican history that induced political, cultural, and consequent linguistic changes. Hence, Gleaner (“Jamaican History I”) specifies six periods, several of which were crucial for the creation of Jamaican Creole. These include: the period after Columbus’s arrival between 1494 and 1692, that is, the period in which the Spanish ruled Jamaica; the second and the third period, related to the destruction of Port Royal and the abolition of slavery in the 19th century, and finally, the sixth period, beginning with August 6, 1962, which recorded Jamaican independency. Present Jamaica, with the population of 2 million habitants, is the most populous English-speaking country in the Greater Antilles (Wells, 1982: 560). 90% of them are of African, while the rest are of

European, Indian, Chinese or Syrian origin (Patrick, 2007: 1). The high number of people of African origin was the product of the slave import, and it is estimated that the number of Africans increased drastically in comparison to the number of Europeans somewhere in the 1670s (Jettka, 2010: 2). However, from the rest of the settlers, only Europeans had a major influence on the formation of Jamaican Creole. The aborigines of the Jamaican island, called Tainos, disappeared shortly after the Spanish colonization, leaving almost no trace of Arawak language behind. Only few words survived, most of which are culturally specific, such as *hurricane*, *cassava*, *Liguanea*, *hammock*, *callaloo* and *guava*, or are present in Spanish place-names, such as *Seville*, *Rio Cobre*, *Puerto Seco* etc. (“Jumieka Langwi”). Furthermore, the very name of Jamaica, according to Cassidy (2007: 10), originates from Arawak word *Xaymaca*, meaning “land of springs”. Jamaica was under the Spanish rule for 150 years, before it was overtaken by the British in 1655. The Portuguese influence is rather indirect, since they dominated Africa and the Caribbean through the slave trade. And yet, some Portuguese remains can be noticed, such as the word *pequeno*. It can be found in Jamaican *pikanini* (“Jumieka Langwi”) or *pickney* meaning “little”, as the artist Queen Ifrica sings: “Dem tun dem back pon mi ah di pickney dem” (“Randy”).

There are many issues among creolist researchers concerning the nature of Jamaican Creole. The question still remains, whether Jamaican Creole developed from a pidgin created on the island, or whether it was the product of relexification of a pidgin that had existed on the African coast. Some creolists state the origin of Jamaican can be found in the Maroon Spirit Language, a descendant of Sranan language in Surinam. Maroons are newer generations of the slaves who were under Spanish colonization for a short period of time, and escaped from the British colonialists upon their arrival by hiding in the isolated woods. They eventually mixed with Arawaks, and not much of their Spanish survived. Soon they assimilated into the rest of the Jamaican society (Cassidy, 2007: 11). They have maintained Twi, an Akan language, and have evolved a Maroon Spirit Language, which resembles Sranan and is often related to the Jamaican folk language (Patrick, 2007: 1). An interesting linguistic and historic relation between these creoles can be noticed in McWhorter’s (2005: 147) statement, that Sranan existed before the Dutch conquest in 1667 and emerged in Jamaica due to the transport of slaves from Surinam to Jamaica in 1671. The conclusion can be drawn that Sranan and Jamaican Creole (basilect) are two varieties of the same creole, which have developed differently under the influence of different colonizers.

Despite various theories, it is certain that the beginning of Jamaican Creole as we know it is closely related to the beginning of the colonization in Jamaica. This mixture was



created somewhere between the 17th and the 18th centuries, when due to slavery, the number of African population rapidly started to grow. In this period, the number of new British settlers compared to Africans was 5:1. The Creole started to develop because of the eventual strong increase of slaves, who did not only come from Africa, but from other colonies such as Surinam and Barbados as well (Patrick, 2007: 1). The slaves had to imitate the language of the colonizers, who were mostly from middle social classes. Their language contained both upper and lower-class linguistic features and belonged to all parts of the British Isles (Cassidy, 2007: 15). Jettka (2010: 2) states that Creole was an inevitable consequence of deliberate mixture of slaves from numerous African tribes and countries where different languages were spoken. The idea was to connect members of different language groups, in order to prevent any rebellion against the colonizer. The curious singularity of this variety lays in the strong African substrate influence, particularly the one from the Bantu, Akan and Kwa language families. The rest of the significant impact originates from the Irish, Scots and West England dialects (Patrick, 2003: 610). These, mainly working-class varieties, left numerous British dialect features, especially in the lexis of Jamaican Creole. Although many of the features have survived, a significant amount of them have been changed under the process of creolization and later language development.

### 3 Language organization

The linguistic situation in Jamaica is rather complicated. There is a great discrepancy between the status of the language and the linguistic reality. Although native Standard English speakers constitute a small minority of the population in Jamaica, they have a monopoly on the island's politics, language planning and culture. The emancipation of slavery encouraged alienation from the standard variety, the result of which was reflected in the maintenance of rural dialects. In such environment many varieties emerge, and often result in code-switching. The use of different codes in Jamaican speech is strongly related to social stratification. The model that is being used by almost every creolist to describe the connection between the language and the social structure is the model of a creole continuum and DeCamp's post-creole continuum. When referring to the linguistic situation, Shaw and Melchers (2003: 123) state that Jamaican speech community is organized within diglossic margins. The first language spoken is Jamaican Creole, Patwa, or "low" variety, and the other one is Standard Jamaican English, also known as "high" variety. On the other hand, Patrick (2003: 610) explains that the very inability to categorize Jamaican Creole using diglossia motivated DeCamp to apply the post-creole continuum model. In his opinion, there cannot be a finite number of discrete dialects, and individuals may be described "as occupying a span of this spectrum rather than speaking a particular dialect" (Patrick, 1999: 7). The spectrum model presupposes a chain of three lects, that is, varieties which are placed between the two linguistic extremes. One extreme is known as *basilect* of Jamaican Creole, while the other one is *acrolect* or Standard Jamaican English, closer to the Internationally Accepted English (IAE). Creolists claim the extreme difference between these two poles. Basilect is the result of the strong language mixing and has always been available to everyone and thus spoken by the majority of Jamaicans, while only a small percentage actively speaks the other extreme, *acrolect*. Mostly the educated minority can use both varieties, usually applying the basilectal form in private life. Both extremes are in fact "idealized abstractions" (Patrick, 2003: 611), since there is the whole range of variable lexical and grammatical realities between the two poles, called *mesolect*. They share some common features, but cannot establish any common genetic correlation. In order to contradict DeCamp's continuum model, Westphal (2014: 10) holds that one of the thoughts is that DeCamp's model aims at the whole speech community, instead of being focused on the individual. To be more specific, DeCamp's overgeneralized

model cannot explain extreme individual variation in creole speech communities, without taking into consideration social factors.

Such language system is the product “of the colonial distribution of power in earlier centuries, which worked to create and maximize the norms that still devalue JamC and elevate StJamE” (Patrick, 2003: 610). A graphical example of the lects is presented in continuation. It is important to highlight that each Jamaican applies various degrees of mesolectal speech, in the form of situational code-switching:

im en a nyam im bickle shi en a nyam shi/im food	BASILECT
shi did a eat shi food shi did a eat ‘ar food shi did eat har food	MESOLECT
shi was eatin her food she was eating her food	ACROLECT

(Westphal, 2014: 8)

Cassidy (2007: 3) implies that, by moving away from the acrolect area towards basilect, one encounters many local language features, which mostly include Jamaican rhythm, intonation, and culturally specific words, called “Jamaicanisms”. Likewise, when approaching the acrolectal end of the continuum, the application of grammatical features not typical of creoles, as well as the inclination towards standard pronunciation, which reveals individual tendency to conceal one’s identity, can be noticed. When dealing with the issue of such language variation, “the only painful group is that of the *parvenu* in education who, having crossed the middle of the scale, now feel that the folk speech is beneath them and scornfully reject it” (Cassidy, 2007: 3). This is a common reaction among people, the syndrome of “going up” in the social status.

### 3.1 Language status

In bilingual or multilingual speech communities, the most prestigious language usually assumes power and most of the political and economic domains. It is not only negative language attitudes or common prejudice about creoles that are preventing Jamaican Creole

from becoming prestigious, but lack of official status and orthography as well. The form of creoles is vernacular, spoken and used in informal, private situations (Westphal, 2014: 1). Many have tried to invent an orthographical system and used various spellings. However, the plurality of orthographical ideas only resulted in problematic process of standardization. Consequently, due to the number of linguistic systems, there is no wrong way of writing in Jamaican Creole. Jettka (2010: 2) suggests the system introduced by Cassidy and LePage represents the most successful attempt in dealing with orthography. This system tries to reproduce the phonological system of Jamaican Talk and is mostly used in the media, with possible variations, since already diverse spoken language sometimes has even five different ways of pronunciation (“Jumieka Langwi”). Here is an example of the two writing systems:

Modified Standard English:	Adaptation of Cassidy and Le Page:
So afta mi daddy lef im, Mama leave an gaan hustle ohside noh, for shi like see di money come een, you know, shi no like fi know say, well den, di man a live offa im own.	So afta mi dadi lef im, Mama liiv an gaan husl otsaid noh, far shi laik si i muni kum iin, yu no, shi no laik fi nuo se wel den di man a lif afa im uon.

(Herbold, “Jamaican Patois”)

Such improvement in language policy, as well as the increase of creole research and their official recognition as languages, have attributed to the creation of positive attitudes, especially in socio-cultural context, thus urging institutions to allow the application of Jamaican Creole in official domains (Jettka, 2010: 4).

### 3.2 Language attitudes

The question which is often raised is: Why has Jamaican Creole been socially degraded to such an extent that even its speakers are “naturally” aware of its low status? Considering the situational environment in which Jamaican Creole emerged, it can be concluded that this variety was initially the result of language acquisition which lacked any

institutional supervision, or further language planning. This fact favored the creation of linguistic and cultural stereotypes. Cassidy (2007: 19) implies that in the past, all Jamaican-born Negroes had to learn English, regardless of their knowledge of other African varieties. Unsupervised language acquisition aside, there was another factor that contributed to both, acquisition and formation of stereotypes. Since there was no Christianization in the first hundred years, no effort was made to civilize the slaves. Eventually, particular language snobbism promoted linguistic purity and elegance, notions which were quite unavailable to slaves. Such cultural and linguistic neglect was the core of a negative attitude towards Jamaican Creole (Cassidy, 2007: 23). It is interesting to observe that creole language, once the source of pure discrimination, today awakens the sense of cultural heritage and national pride, as well as it gradually encourages positive identity awareness. Nevertheless, attitudes are unlikely to be completely changed over a short period of time. From the Standard English point of view, changes which occurred in Jamaican Creole have mostly been considered “corruptions” until recently. From this socio-historic perception, such understanding seems completely justifiable. In linguistic reality, however, it is a mistake to use the same criteria for comparison of these two varieties, since Jamaican Creole does not “pretend to be standard” (Cassidy, 2007: 9). In theory, language should not determine the identity of an ethnic group, or any other speech community. Yet, identity is not only established by the way a speech community perceives itself, but by the way others perceive it as well. Thus, Cassidy (2007: 9) asserts that Standard English attitude toward Jamaican Creole being a corrupted language would not have been considered as harmful, if the attitude towards the language had not affected the attitude towards the whole nation, regarding it as ignorant, stupid, and lazy. Therefore, although a lot of progress has been done, the conceptual separation of Jamaican Creole and Standard Jamaican Creole is still not established. In the last decades a lot of effort has been invested into separating Jamaican Creole from Standard Jamaican English.

When dealing with education, only a small minority of children are competent in both language varieties. Jettka (2010: 5) holds that speakers of Jamaican Creole have many classroom difficulties when learning Standard Jamaican English. In 2001 a Language Education Policy (LEP) was formulated in order to offer better solutions, since 50% of students consistently fail to obtain satisfying results. Learning becomes difficult since Standard Jamaican English is not their first language, and most of the topics are processed through “internal translation” (Smith, 2012). In 2004 the Bilingual Education Project (BEP) was created in order to analyze the results of bilingual instruction by attributing the same status to both Jamaican Creole and Standard Jamaican English in education. The goal of such

way of teaching is to enable students to distinguish both varieties and change negative language attitudes towards neutral ones by equalizing the value of both idioms (Smith, 2012).

When describing Jamaica's language dilemma, Smith (2012) stresses a few negative points regarding the problem of Patois becoming the official language. According to him, the majority considers Standard English to be crucial for easier employment, since it is spoken by the rest of the world. Moreover, English having a second-language status will cause a great decrease in overall comprehension and will attribute to Jamaican isolation and marginalization. Thus, if Jamaican Creole becomes official, a significant social division and segregation would take place and linguistic stereotypes would be encouraged again. The result of this situation would be that only wealthy people would be able to educate their children in both varieties.

### **3.3 The process of decreolization**

It is in the nature of every language to change, and creole languages are no exception. Westphal (2014: 14) presents Hall's cycle theory, which states five stages of a creole language. These include pidginization, stabilization and expansion, and consequent creolization, followed by the creation of a creole continuum with present lexifier. The last stage is *decreolization*, that is, the change of a creole toward a lexifier language under its strong influence. In recent years the process of slow decreolization started to gain more power. This process includes a variety of new borrowings from English language, especially due to the media influence, such as hip-hop culture. Westphal (2014: 14) notes that the process of decreolization is normally followed by the appearance of the Post-creole Continuum and the emergence of high frequency variation among social scales, eventually resulting in the gradual extinction of a creole (Westphal, 2014: 14). However, although Standard English as a lexifier has a great influence, as long as the borrowed words are jamaicanized and speech patterns remain unchanged, there is no concern for dramatic language shift at this point ("Jumieka Langwi"). Even though Jamaican Creole is quite unstable due to the lack of language-planning systems, standardization, and diglossia present in formal settings and broadcasting, "Creole on the air is very vital and not subject to decreolization, rather on the contrary it is steadily increasing" (Westphal, 2014: 66). What is more, the bond between the Creole and the identity is still strong thus preventing decreolization.

## 4 Music history

The high and the low variety of the diglossia model have recently almost blended their boundaries in Jamaican speech, due to its natural change and the existence of certain attitudes. These attitudes toward Jamaican culture and language are mostly formed as a result of the mass media influence. Currently, the notion of African heritage is spread throughout almost all cultural domains, especially music, becoming quite an important factor in the creation of positive attitudes towards the language. “Music makes up the most part of time in broadcasting and is also an important tool to convey local culture and language” (Westphal, 2014: 13). Jamaican music has been suppressed for a very long time; nevertheless, it has managed to become the reflection of the Jamaican culture, history, religion, and mentality. During the 30s and the 50s, the only music that was played on the radio was American and British. Music genre *mento*, as well as other folk songs, had little space and attention in music programs. The 1960s were the time when *ska* music started to spread and influence Jamaican music by its special accented offbeat rhythm. The crucial period of Jamaican music, however, started in the late 60s, when musicians started to play with the beat, by slowing the tempo of *rocksteady* and mixing it with American *soul* music, thus creating a new sound that later developed into *reggae* and gained international success. It was not only the beauty of the music and positive “vibe” that charmed the audience, but linguistic elements as well. More precisely, until the beginning of reggae, radio stations did not play music in Creole, the reason why *ska* and *rocksteady* never became as popular as reggae outside Jamaican borders. There was another important influence that determined the course of reggae development, and it was the emergence of Rastafarianism. The movement that started in the 70s criticized the politics and society, and favored the notions of freedom of linguistic and social expression, thus popularizing basilect and Rasta Talk (Westphal, 2014: 23-37). Rasta Talk, also known as Dread Talk, includes structures, words, and phrases which reflect their beliefs. Wilson provides an example of such language use in which the letter “I” and the word “Jah” are referred to some spiritual notions that represent their pride of being the children of Jah, that is, God. Therefore, one can encounter *Iower* “power”, *I-sire* “desire”, or *Jah know* “God knows” (Wilson, 2004: 27). At the very beginning however, due to many negative attitudes towards Rastas and Rasta Talk, *pop reggae* was usually played on radio stations. The Jamaican music from the 70s portrays well the linguistic continuum, from basilect to Standard English. Westphal implies that “the music was the second most important factor bringing about the

erosion of the Diglossia in the radio domain” (Westphal, 2014: 37- 38). Reggae lyrics mostly described current everyday situations and poor circumstances, poverty, violence, and independence.

The Honorable Robert Nesta Marley, known as Bob Marley, is one of the first and most famous reggae musicians. His historical role in the reggae music industry, as well as in the rise of the national pride, is essential to a complete understanding of Jamaican language. As a young man, he started to experiment with reggae music and formed a group called the Wailing Wailers. He was a Rastafarian, which is reflected in all of his songs. From the mass media point of view, Marley’s heritage was immense, popularizing Jamaican culture within and outside the boundaries (Wilson, 2004: 25). His death in 1981 marked the end of the *roots reggae* period and made way to the production of more experimental, electronic sounds, influenced by Dub music from the late 70s. Technology soon completely replaced traditional instruments and produced another musical variety, called *dancehall*, while singing switched to toasting (similar to rapping). Singing today remains a feature of mesolect, while toasting represents basilect (Westphal, 2014: 48-65). The Rasta Talk switch to dancehall can especially be seen in the superficial lyrics that promote violence, materialism and sexuality. The importance of dancehall, despite the often slack lyrics, lies in the immense popularization of the basilectal variety of Jamaican Creole. In the beginning of the 90s, dancehall was quite cluttered with sexist lyrics. Yet, in the mid 90s, it turns to its roots, bringing Rastafarian ideology and culture in the first place. Lyrics are once more shifted to mesolectal speech and Dread Talk. The mesolectal shift is influenced by “Rastafarian cultural topics and Conscious Dancehall’s immense international success” (Westphal, 2014: 65). Nevertheless, according to Westphal (2014: 65), one is still unlikely to come across dancehall music in shows broadcasted during the day; it can mostly be heard in the night programs.

Whether the lyrics have positive or negative connotations, or they are the reflection of social, political, and religious beliefs, reggae music is filled with symbolism. Herbold (“Jamaican Patois”) exemplifies the metaphor of Babylon, which stands for “downpressor”, and Zion, as its opposition. Overall, there are many Biblical references with powerful messages, showing once more that the language power in reggae music has the ability to impact the government and politicians, thus urging them to accept and recognize the relevance of reggae music. Many of them tend to use the basilectal variety to attract the “ghetto voters”, unaware of the fact that they could possibly offend them. The author says: “It is clear that politicians must learn that Reggae music is not meant for the political arena as it



stands today and should remain a source of power for the revolutionaries” (Herbold, “Jamaican Patois”).

## 5 Lexical and grammatical features of reggae lyrics

The idea of analyzing reggae lyrics is based on the assumption that spoken language is quite often used in song lyrics, and provides a good insight into actual speech, where informal grammatical constructions, phrases, and vocabulary are present. 53 reggae songs (dancehall included), among which there is one *mento* and one *ska* song, were randomly chosen and some specific terms were analyzed, as well as their most general grammatical features. Most of the explanations or word translations were found in online databases and dictionaries. The inability to find any Jamaican Patois-English dictionary, as well as orthographical system differences, presented most of the research problems.

### 5.1 Lexical features

Jamaican Patois in its form follows the usual grammatical patterns ascribed to creole languages, among which one can observe numerous simplifications on the phonological, morphological, syntactical, and lexical level. Regarding its lexis, Jamaican Creole usually borrows words from Standard English and “jamaicanizes” them according to the Jamaican phonological criteria. Jamaicanisms include many types of word creation, most of which fall under preservations, borrowings, new formations, transferred meanings etc. It is interesting to observe how languages influence one another, leaving not only linguistic, but historical traces as well. The same happened with the 17th century English, the traces of which are still present in the Jamaican speech under the category of preservations. Some words, such as *moonshine* denoting *moonlight*, although normally used in Jamaica, are rare and poetic forms in Britain. Examples of such use of lexis can be found in reggae lyrics “*Moonshine* tonight come mek we dance and sing” (“Moonshine tonight”), and Jamaican folk song or *mento*, one of the predecessors of reggae, where in the song “Cudelia Brown” (Cordelia Brown) *moonshine* is mentioned three times:

On a *moonshine* night, on a *moonshine* night,  
I met Missa Ivan, an' Missa Ivan tol' me,  
Sey dat 'im gi Neita di drop, Jamaica flop, and di *moonshine* drop...

Another peculiarity worth mentioning is the historical metathesis *aks*, a Middle English form of “ask”, which is still used by Jamaicans, and has even spread to African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Hence the example found in the song “Pumkin Belly”:

“Who *aks* me dat, nuh me ole time granny”

and Vybz Kartel’s “Thank Yuh Jah”:

“Weh di black woman future me *aks* him”

Another example of metathesis could be *yai* or *yay*, the Jamaican word for *eye*, found in Gyptian’s song “Call”:

“Mi ah tell the older one dem fi tek care of the school pickney *yay*, mommy haffi work hard fi send dem ah school”.

Borrowing, the most usual way of creating new words in Jamaican Creole, is characterized by words of various origins, which entered English language through Jamaican. An example of *cashew*, which entered English from French *acajou*, Portuguese *acaju*, and Tupí Indian *acajú* is present in Jah Sun’s song “No Bones No Blood”:

Tell dem root, strongback and sarsaparilla,  
fruits, oranges, mango and guava.  
Vegetable salad with peanut and *cashew*,  
With some clean drinking water...

The words presented underwent typical creolization, that is, elision of the front vowel. Many other words entered the English language through Jamaican, such as words *bling* and *diss*, which are not even considered English slang anymore, but part of “respectable” vocabulary. “Urban dictionary” explains *bling* as “the imaginary ‘sound’ that is produced from light reflected by a diamond”. This term has become popularized through rap music. “Speak Jamaican” confirms the same by implying that such Jamaican slang term is usually heard as *bling-bling* in America, and refers to something fancy. However, it can be found in the same form in Jamaican as well, as in the UB40 reggae song:

“*Bling, bling*, yeah, aweh mi smiting, *bling, bling*, emerald cut ring”.

In Mr. Vegas’s older song “Raging Bull” *bling* also appears in the form *Blingers*, for example:

“Follow black *blingers* and tek weh yusef”

What is more, it appears in the introduction of his recent song “Tek Weh Yuhself”:

“Ravers Clavers, Black *Blingers*, Timless, Sample 6 All Dancers...”.

*Diss*, shortened for already known and internationally used “disrespectful”, can be found in Anthony B.’s “World a Reggae Music”:

“When yuh *diss* a ghetto yute di country yuh mislead, a try stop crime yuh wonder why it proceed, caan *diss* di music too much man it feed.”

It can acquire different meanings if written as *dis*, depending on the context. Thus, in “Ducktor bwoy caan *dis* di school” (Damian Marley, “Set up Shop”) *dis* is simply an orthographical variant of *diss*; however, it can also acquire the meaning of a demonstrative pronoun “this”:

“Do *dis* for me no, go go twist pon di pole” (Aidonia, “Fi di Jockey”).

Another two utterly Jamaican words are *ganja*, meaning “marijuana”, and *Spliff*, denoting “large, cone-shaped marijuana cigarette” (Pawka, “Rasta/Patois Dictionary”). Examples of both can be found in Beenie Man’s song “Ganja Fi Bun”:

*Ganja* fi burn, it haffi burn  
 High grade a fly to mi brain like sonic  
 Mi weed feel big like the pacific  
*Spliff* big like the SS Titanic  
 Seriously mi naw be ironic

Other words are usually the result of borrowing. A Scotticism *dilly-dally*, for example, means “to idle”. Its use was not present in any reggae song from the corpus, but only in ska genre, in the song “Dilly Dally” by Toots & The Maytals, written in the acrolect. It is rather interesting that such a “jamaicanized” word has found its place in ska music of that period. Therefore, it seems that words of colonized origin, used by all social classes, were more likely to be accepted in the acrolect than the ones of African or Jamaican origin. Furthermore, many food and plant names came from Spanish or Portuguese, French, East Indian, and mostly African languages, such as *mangoes*, *yams*, *ackees* etc. The word *ackee*, for example, is of the Kru origin, “a-kee”, and can be noticed in Mr. Vegas and Shaggy’s song “Sweet Jamaica”:

“Sweet sweet Jamaica wi nah lef yah, love wi *ackee* and wi saltfish wi nah left yah”

Another type of Jamaicanisms called *new formations* is usually the product of phonological alterations. Therefore, new words are created by alterations such as reduction through elision, that is, *lone* for “alone”, *fence* for “defence”, and already mentioned *cashew*. There is a rare example of *lone* used in reggae lyrics:

“Wa you seh *lone* brown skin, dem done gi wi the crown wi a king” (“Nah Lef”)

However, there are no corpus lyrics that used the word *fence* instead of *defence*. What is more, in the mostly basilectal “Too Much Gun” lyrics, where one would expect “deviation from the standard”, *defence* appears in the following form:

“Talk bout *self-de-fence* wi di gun, say him nah itch fi di guns”

There is another word that does not appear in reggae lyrics in its basilectal form, and that is the word *cruffy*. This adjective probably originates from *scurfy*, with regular reduction of sk-

into k-, followed by metathesis, or it could be the result of blending based on *rough* and *scurfy*.

The reason many words could not be found in their basilectal form is that, although the reputation of Jamaican Creole has bolstered, and the production of basilectal reggae songs continues to increase, especially in dancehall, there is still a strong inclination towards mesolectal, and frequently acrolectal production. This explains why it was easy to find standard lexis in most of the corpus. However, other new formations can be noticed. An interesting example can be found in the song “Certain Gal” by Beenie Man:

“She a big big big *poppy show* that you fi know, certain gal a gwaan nice but she low”.

The author uses a phrase *poppy show*, which interestingly does not derive from the flower, but from the word “puppet” and, according to the “Talk Jamaican Dictionary”, means to “make fun of someone”. Moreover, this expression can be understood as an old-school phrase which describes someone who is showing off and is being boastful. Another word that is often found in reggae songs, *likkle/likle/likkl/lickle* meaning “little”, is present in:

- 1) “Put it to yur chest, a *likkl* punk outta street cyaan test” (Daddy Freddy, “Hot A Di Press”)
- 2) “*Likkle* yute just cool wid di gun” (Busy Signal, “Too Much Gun”)
- 3) “Well enough *likkle* girl dem bought they own dem got di goody goody” (Sean Paul, “Like Glue”)

In Sean Paul’s “Bruk Out”: “Gyal just bruk out pon di floor, shake up your body *likkle* more”, *likkle more* literally means *little more*. However, this word phrase can change its meaning according to context, and can even mean “see you later” or “goodbye” in spoken language (Patois and Slang Dictionary). Furthermore, the form of *lickle* found its place in Enur’s song “Calabria”:

“Noti na the mickle play with it a *lickle*, why you so na tickle”.

In this phrase one can also observe another word, *mickle*. This word falls in the same category with *dilly-dally* and *moonshine*. It is an archaic Scottish and Northern English expression for “a large amount” and is often used in the phrase “many a mickle makes a muckle”, signifying “a lot of accumulated things make a bigger thing” and is today used in Jamaican in the sense of doing something little by little.

Word *Sidong* is a representation of lexical variation across the three lects. *Sidong* belongs to the basilect, meaning “to sit down” (“Jumieka Langwi”). It can be found in Mr. Vegas’s song “Sweet Jamaica”:

“Mi and mi brethen dem *siddon* pon di corner”

and Aidonia's song "Fi Di Jockey":

"*Sidung* fi di jockey... So *sidung* dash down yuh weight pon di chair".

Interestingly, when trying to find any reggae lyrics that would use such word, one could only encounter it used in sexual connotations, as in the latter example. This is one of the examples which prove that basilect is more often used in slack and sexually offensive reggae lyrics than acrolect, especially in dancehall. Another similarly constructed word from the corpus is the word *lydung*. *Dung* is Jamaican word for "down", hence *lydung/ lay dung* would be the basilectal form of "lay down", also found in the form of *lydown* in the mesolect. Here are the examples of each form:

- 1) "Say any man weh *lydung* wid a next man... Cah when a man go *lay dung* wid anotha man" (Vybz Kartel, "No Man")
- 2) "So inna bed girl mi cyaa *lydown*, cause the road rough and it hard right now" (I-Octane, "Jah Jah Mission").

Some words borrowed from Standard English eventually changed their meanings, such as *yard* and *bredren*. *Bredren*, written as *brethren* in the previously mentioned verse of Mr. Vegas's song "Sweet Jamaica", today means a "friend", while *yard* or *yaad* ("Jumieka Langwi") in Jamaican Creole refers to "home" or "homeland" (Karl, 2005). The example of *yard* can be seen in Mellow Mood's "Dance Inna Di Babylon":

"Back inna the *yard* living gets so hard"

and Damian Marley's "Set Up Shop":

"Come a fimi *yard* it decorate wid plaques".

The most productive type of new formations is composition of two or more already existing native or foreign elements. Whether it is the case of blending as in *cruffy* or reduplication, new formations are the reflection of language economy and folk etymology. In reggae vocabulary, the most frequent type of new formations is the latter one. Reduplication is typical of creole languages, and is often the result of some kind of emphatic use, especially in verbs. There are numerous reduplications in everyday speech, such as: *tief-tief* for "thieving", *fenky-fenky* for "finicking", and *kas-kas* for "quarrelling". The latter one can be spelled as *cuss-cuss* or *koskos* as well, since the suspected source of this word is African Twi language, and its interpretation is possibly the result of folk etymology, where *cuss* is the informal form of "curse". It is mentioned in Dandy Livingstone's song "Reggae In Your Jeggae":

"Lady, me nuh wan' no *cuss cuss*, Lady, me nuh wan' no fuss fuss..."

Finally, reduplication is found in Elephant Man's song "Chaka Chaka":

“Its a beautiful ting, wen yuh dancing, dance to di rhythm, *chakka chakka* everybady now”, where *chaka chaka* implies “disorder”. It originates from African language Ewe, as *tyáka* (Watson, 1991: 10). The following example, Queen Ifrica’s song “Sinsemilla”, provides two interesting, Jamaican terms, apart from already known *Babylon* and *Rastafari*:

*Babylon* hear what we a say  
*Rastafari* say, yeah yeah yeah  
*Sinsemilla* give me a vibe sah  
 To blaze in my *chalwah*  
 Getting me higher

*Sinsemilla* is a very clear example of Spanish influence, and was first recorded in 1975. Its origin can be found in Spanish word formation; *sin* meaning “without”, and *semilla* meaning “seed”. The word denotes “highly potent marijuana from female plants that are specially tended and kept seedless” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). *Chalwah* is another synonym for chalice, which designates a type of marijuana pipe, made out of stone and used as part of Rasta Rite (Urban Dictionary). In the Rastafari movement, as it has already been mentioned, there are many biblical notions and metaphors which usually carry powerful social and political messages. One of the most typical words, *Babylon*, refers to the police and the corrupt institutions, such as Church and State. It can be found in older songs, in Bob Marley’s “Chant Down Babylon”:

“Come we go burn down *Babylon* one more time”,

as well as in the modern ones, such as Mellow Mood’s powerful song “Dance Inna Babylon”:

“Dance inna *Babylon*, until its throne a fall, I’n’I who see teachings of the Rastaman”.

Apart from *Babylon*, one can observe another Rastafarian feature, previously mentioned in theory, the I-ness in the example *I’n’I*, where it denotes “we”. In the song “Jah Atmosphere” by Soja, the same is repeated:

“In Jah atmosphere, Lord there *I’n’I* must be”.

In Standard English some words imply opposite meaning from what their form suggests. Therefore, under the influence of Rastafarianism, many of them change their form. For example, a Jamaican person would use *overstand* for “understand”, because one is over something if they understand it, not under it. The same happens with the use of *downpress* for “oppress”, the form which implies “up”. The use of *overstand* is exemplified in “Nothing to Smile About” by Morgan Heritage:

“... dem say want feelin' to dem heart, when dem get fi *overstand* di real thing...”.

*Downpress* is also present in the acrolect in which Prince Alla's song "Go Down in Silence" was written:

"They *downpress* the poor man in a violence".

Another "spiritually oriented" term is *duppy*, a word of West African origin meaning "ghost" or "spirit" (Grime slang glossary):

"Yuh nuh thuggy thuggy yuh a *duppy* bat, look inna di mirror yuh, na see say is a idiot yuh lookin at... *Duppy* know who fi frighten".

*Nyam*, a frequently used word in reggae songs, derives from West African word meaning "to eat" ("Oxford Dictionaries"). It appears in "Too Much Gun" by Busy Signal:

"Dem a *nyam* bad man, bout dem a bad man, like taylor dem a stitch fi di gun"

and in already mentioned song "Thank Yuh Jah":

"Nuff juvenile nuh even *nyam* from morning..."

Creole languages base most of their lexis on the phonological features of a lexifier, which in the process of creolization undergo phonological rules such as assimilation, the rule that could not be found in early pidgins. There is an example of the Jamaican word *han-migl* (English hand + middle), which refers to the palm of the hand. This kind of embedding could have been a direct calque of an African language expression. Unfortunately, hardly any example could be found in the reggae lyrics from the corpus. There is an example of acrolectal *palm* in the song of Tanya Stephens, "Who Is Tanya":

"Mi no haffi strip fi control dem man yah, mi have di game inna di palm a mi hand yah".

However, in order to verify the existence of such compound word, Google records the use of *han-migl* on the Twitter page of "Ms Jamaican Sinting" in the phrase

"Di oda day wen mi *han migl* did a krach mi, mi did tink mi did a win powa ball a Flarida, but siit de, Granny win" (JamaicanSinting).

This example might possibly confirm once more that basilectal language is still less common to be found in the music industry and the mainstream media.

Everyday lexis is mostly related to Standard English in its origin, and is often only phonetically adapted, or "jamaicanized". One of the famous current dancehall hits "Watch out fi dis" is the reflection of the most recent features of Jamaican Creole and Standard English relationship. It shows some basilectal peculiarities and Jamaicanisms, but is culturally even more important, since it represents a significant improvement in the creation of positive language attitudes towards Jamaican Creole in the media. It has become internationally popular to such an extent, that only Youtube records more than 52 million views. When observing the vocabulary, one can notice that overall intelligibility is not affected by



orthographical changes: *Fi* instead of “*for*”, *pon* instead of “*on*”, and different spellings of “*the*” and “*number*”, if not understood separately, are easily understood when found in context:

“Watch out *fi* dis, a *di* maddest lyrics, mash up *di* place, push you hand up *fi* dis, yo mi nah miss *numba* one *pon di* list...”.

Moreover, there are two phrases that are quite known and used in the urban speech, but are originally Jamaican: a phrase *mash up* instead of “destroy”, and *tun up* from the verse

“Sound *tun up* inna di place”,

meaning “great” and “wonderful” (Patois and Slang Dictionary).

In the verse

“Aye, bumboclat me and mi friend dem a *gyalist*, craftiest”,

an interesting word formation *gyalist* can be noticed, derived from *gyal* or “girl”, meaning *player* (Patois and Slang Dictionary).

*Bashment* is a popular reggae word for a “party”:

“Mi love *fi* see di uhman dem inna *bashment* cleek” (Frisco Kid, “Living in Style”).

*Trace*, meaning “to swear” or “to curse” can be observed in “Nah Trace” by Bounty Killer and in Mavado’s “Amazing Grace”:

“The bwoy dem a *trace*, shoot up dem base”.

There are other phrases typical of everyday speech, which often find their place in reggae lyrics. For example, *buck up*, which in informal English would mean “to get over something”, in Jamaican Creole means “to meet”:

“Now me get *fi* buck her up inna di dancehall” (Sean Paul, “Bruk Out”).

Finally, *me deya* (literally “I am there”), found in the title song “Me Deya” by Nechi Nech & Soul-J, is an expression which to a certain extent corresponds to the informal Croatian response to “*di si, šta ima?*” – “*A e’o*”.

## 5.2 Grammatical features

The very term *creole* is only a sociohistorical term, because its grammar today is as complicated and structurally organized as in any other language. Without knowing the historical aspect of creole languages, one cannot recognize any difference in their grammatical structure. Therefore, although it might sound as broken, grammarless English, or confusing babble to a stranger, Jamaican Creole does have clearly defined rules. Grammar of a language is a wide and complex area, especially if it is not clearly defined in grammar

books. Thus, in this section, the emphasis will be put only on certain prominent features of Jamaican Creole, that is, a short and general insight will be provided into its pronouns, prepositions, basic present and past forms of verbs, and their negation. Although present in lexis, the real difference between the three lects in Jamaican Creole can be noticed in grammar. Most of the theories point to language superstrate or substrate influence, as well as various language universals. English as the lexifier did not influence Jamaican grammar to such an extent as African languages did. Most of its influence can be found only in the acrolect. Here is the difference in the use of personal and possessive pronouns:

Personal pronouns:

Akrolek	Miizolek	Bazilek
I	ai/a	<b>mi</b>
you	yuu	<b>yu</b>
he/she/it	im/shi/hit	<b>ihn/ihn/i</b>
we	wi	<b>wi</b>
you	unu	<b>unu</b>
they	de(m)	<b>dehn</b>

Possessive pronouns:

Akrolek	Miizolek	Bazilek
my - mine	mai - mainz	<b>mi - fimi</b>
your - yours	yo - yorz	<b>yu - fiyu</b>
his/her - hers/its	iz/er - erz/it	<b>ihn/ar/i - fiim/fiar/fiit</b>
our - ours	howa - howaz	<b>fiwi - fiwi</b>
your - yours	yuor - yorz	<b>unu - fiunu</b>
their - theirs	dier - dierz	<b>fidem - fidem</b>

(“Jumieka Langwi”)

The type of personal and possessive pronouns used in reggae lyrics is usually the mesolectal and the acrolectal one. Considering that the acrolect is still the most prestigious variety and is mostly used in reggae lyrics, the assumption was that there would be more acrolectal than mesolectal and basilectal features of pronouns in certain contexts. Interestingly, the results were not as evident as it had been expected. As far as the pronouns are concerned, out of the 53 reggae songs used for the corpus investigation, *mi* is surprisingly used in each song at least once, while *my* is present in only 22 reggae lyrics. Nevertheless, the rest of the prepositions could be found mostly in the acrolectal and rarely in the basilectal form. Rare basilectal

features of prepositions from the corpus were found in Damian Marley's song "Set up Shop", where one can notice the use of *fimi* instead of *my* in

"Come a *fimi* yard it decorate wid plaques".

Likewise, *unno* in "Unno fi setup shop" from the same song refers to the plural form of "you", also found in writing as *uno* (Patois and Slang Dictionary), *unu* ("Jumieka Langwi"), and even *oonoo* (Karl, 2005). This is only one of many examples of Jamaican's disunited orthography. In the example of Vybz Kartel's song "School" both basilectal and acrolectal forms are present, as well as the possessive *yo*:

"School youth *unuh* pant's too tight... Meck *yo* mother proud, *yuh* no si how shi fight".

In Vybz Kartel's "Send Fi Mi Army", the lyrics demonstrate the use of pronouns *we*, *dem*, and *mi*:

"We dark again...Wet *dem* up like a tsunami... *Dem* wha fi war mi suh mi sen fi *mi* army". *Dem* derives from the 3<sup>rd</sup> person and has the role of plural demonstrative, meaning *them* or *their*. However, it can represent the basilectal plural-marker when it is in post-nominal position:

"Big up di gyal dem weh fight it alone" (Vybz Kartel, "Thank Yuh Yah").

As far as the prepositions are concerned, Atlantic Creoles have a general locative preposition, *na/ina/a*, which could obtain various meanings depending on the verbal context; indicating location or motion (to/from), and can cover semantic contexts of Standard English *at*, *in*, *on*, *to*, *during*, and *into*. Here are two examples of *ina* use in songs "Man a conquerer" and "Bun 'till a morning" by VirtuS:

- 1) "...'ca everyday *ina* di ghetto man a kill, man a die  
shotta fyah *inna* di streets, a bwoy boom bye  
see da blood *in* downtown, see di muma dem a cry..."
- 2) "...a so mi jump around an put mi di weeda *ina* di gun..."

The first example shows once more the orthographic disarray in the spelling, indicating the song is written in mesolect, since one can encounter three different uses and spellings of locative preposition, *ina*, *inna*, and *in*. Furthermore, it shows other grammatical characteristics of creoles related to verbal aspect, such as "man a die" and "see di muma dem a cry", discussed in continuation.

One of the most distinctive features of creole languages is their TMA (Tense, Mood and Aspect) marker system. This system is characterized by the use of particles *be*, *go* and *a*

before the unmarked verb stems, and is applied in creoles all over the world. Verbs are generally not inflected and do not change in number, case, or time. Often the only way of distinguishing their meanings is through context. Unmarked verbs in the past do not add *-ed* suffix, at least not in basilectal Creole. The use of *-ed* suffix is considered an interference of Standard English.

According to many studies, basilectal Jamaican Creole has an interesting way of expressing the progressive aspect, most frequently by using particle *a*, but rarely through particles such as *de* and *gwan* (go). Drawing a parallel to the Standard English grammar, it can be concluded that *a* in Jamaican Creole replaces the *-ing* inflection. It usually precedes a non-stative verb, so as to indicate an on-going action, for example “Me a go”. There might be an indirect connection between today’s formation of Jamaican progressive aspect and early Modern English *a*-prefixing, in which *a* is related to a locative preposition *on*: *a-working*, *a-hunting*, etc. This progressive marker might represent the remains of historical English in Jamaican Creole, whereby Creole lost the *-ing* inflection through the process of simplification in pidginization, while the progressive preverbal marker remained analytical.

Here are some examples of such use in the reggae songs:

- 1) “Dem deh together and *a build*... Man *a run* a taxi, even if a battery... Mi gal *a pree* diamonds...” (Damian Marley, “Set up Shop”)
- 2) “Sound *a bounce* and the place *a full up*... Gal *a go dung* pon head dat me love... Di gal dem *a twist*, waist line caan resist... When good music *a play* seh mi glad...” (Major Lazer, “Watch Out Fi Dis”)
- 3) “...Babylon man *a go* work yuh too greed” (Queen Ifrica, “Sinsemilla”)

The particle *a* can also be found in writing as *ah*:

“Yuh bestfriend *ah* pressure mi, tek interest ina mi” (Queen Ifrica – Randy).

Word *gwain*, written also as *gwan*, *gwaan* and sometimes *going*, expresses progressive present or progressive future, as *going to* in the Standard English. Only one example of *gwan* use from the corpus was found in Chaka Demus & Pliers's song “Murder She Wrote”:

“Gal ya *gwan* get kill, gal keep 'way...”.

There was no example of *de* particle in any reggae song. When describing the use of particle *da* or *de*, it is important to mention that one will not hear it as often as *a* or *gwan* because *de* is typical of western Jamaica, and is more related to rural areas. This explanation might account for the lack of *da* and *de* use in the mainstream media.

Since it is often not transparent whether a song is narrated in the past or present, it becomes quite difficult to recognize the tense. An example of confusing tense usage can be seen in the song “Rasta Love” by Protoje that is of a narrative nature. One can notice verbs *say*, *want/waan*, *seh*, *nah mek*, *start*, and *be*, where once more the application of different (mesolectal) orthography is present, as well as the occasional use of Standard-like form *were* and the absence of copula “from who she with”:

Know har story before she *say* it, daddy just *want* her cooperate  
 Find somebody that's cooperate, suit on time were appropriate  
 Him *seh* him *nah mek* him daughta stray, but Reggae music she *start* fi play it  
 ...  
 So him *waan* keep har off the street, *from who she with*  
 And dat *be* mean, more than a Natty yeah this what she see  
 Not love asleep is not for me  
 And she nuh want keep it a secret but she cyan tell him who she sleep with

In order to explain Jamaican tense formation, one must refer to the distinction between stative (have, feel, want) and non-stative (go, come, play) verbs, since stative verbs can, but do not necessarily have past reference in the Creole. In Standard English stative verbs are mostly unmarked (“I feel”), with some exceptions, as in “I am feeling this”, while non-stative verbs are usually marked (“I am going”). In the basilectal and partly mesolectal Jamaican Creole unmarked stative verbs are non-past in reference, except for when followed by a preverbal marker, as *ben* or *did*. There are some occasions in which the statives are not preceded by markers, but are still past in reference. In such situations they are contextually clarified:

“I said they *want* I to be their man” (Gyptian, “Call”),

Thus, *said* in the example above helps the overall sentence contextualization. Nevertheless, unmarked statives are usually non-past in reference, as in:

“Yuh *feel* yuh can test dis, Yuh *wah* bet?” (Tanya Stephens, “Who is Tanya”).

Non-stative verbs, such as *come*, do not use markers for past, but do apply the auxiliary verb *do* in its past form *did*, *done*, *don* when implying completive aspect:

“Shabba Ranking *done seh* dat...” (Spragga Benz, “Dem Flop”).

Here *done seh* indicates completeness of the past form “said” and can also occur after the verb phrase. In order to make simple past reference past progressive, the *a* particle has to be inserted with non-stative verbs. The result would be:

“...and I always know where we *a come* from” (Mellow Mood, “Dance Inna Babylon”).

The *a* particle is very important, since such details change the whole tense aspect, as its omission changes past progressive reference to simply past one:

“...bad like a yard, which part mi *come* from” (Daddy Freddy, “Hot a di Press”).

When observing the formation and use of negation in Jamaican Creole, it is evident that Creole has double negation that serves as an emphatic marker. Some of the negative structures are *nutten*, *not’n*, or *notin* meaning “nothing”, and *nuh*, *noh*, and *nu* meaning “no”. It usually consists of a verb in its infinitive form preceded by a negative particle and there are no contractions at all. Hence some corpus examples of basic negation:

“Mi *nah* fi get where mi a come from mi *nah* go dish yuh dirt... *Nah* trespass pon mi plantation” (Buju Banton, “Bonafide Love”).

Here are some examples of double negation structures, as *Nutten nah gwan* meaning “nothing’s going on” in:

- 1) “And *nuttin nah* gwaan fi dem, becau di whole a dem flop” (Spragga Benz “Dem Flop”)
- 2) “Just walk it gently and *no* break *nah* bone” (Enur, “Calabria”)
- 3) “*Nah* get *nuh* help from *nuh* bwoy or *nuh* show” (Queen Ifrica, “Randy”)
- 4) “*Nobody nuh* fraid ah yuh talking” (Vybz Kartel, “Duppy Know”)
- 5) “Tell dem mi seh *nuttin no* go so” (Notch, “Nuttin No Go So”)

In the last example the song title means “Nothing goes the way you say it goes”. Last negative form often used is the adverb *neva*, found in

“Dem *neva* believe this murda would be so tragic” (Bounty Killer, “Nah Trace”)

and *naa*, composed of *no* and preverbal *a*:

“Caah a gal waan money an she *naah* lift a straw” (Frisco Kid, “Living in Style”).

Modal verbs in their affirmative form partly resemble Standard English modals since they also have no inflections:

- 1) “Suh mi *can* always all tek har pun tour” (Capleton, “Crazy Looks”)
- 2) “How *can* a nation believe in this way” (Morgan Heritage, “Nothing to Smile About”),
- 3) “...weh *coulda* be a gunman” (Anthony B, “World a Reggae Music”)
- 4) “...pass me now di chalis so yuh see my smile, smoke *coulda* be anotha way fi pray di fatha...” (VirtuS, “Bun ‘till a morning”).

Most of the modals are actually double modals, with numerous combinations of two elements.

In the following example the modal is constructed of *have* + *fi*: *Hafi*:

“An she *hafi* hice up de red an de gold an de grean, in har heart she *hafi* let rasta in” (Capleton, “Crazy Looks”).

In the same song one can also encounter its negation, *naffi*, which once more serves as an example of double negation, being followed by *nor*:

“And de wrong tree man meh seh she caan climb She *nafi* def she *nafi* dumb she *nafi* cripple *nor* blind”.

Negative modals can be spelled in various ways, for example, the negative form of *cyan* meaning “can” is *kyaahn*, as listed in “Jumieka Langwi” or *cyaan*, *kaan*, *kean*. Some examples of the use of *cyaan* negative modals are here presented:

- 1) “...a likkl punk outta street cyaan test...” (Daddy Freddy, “Hot A Di Press”)
- 2) “...nobody cyaan stop me pon di riddim...” (VirtuS, “Man a conquerer”)
- 3) “Some party a gwaan that cyaan miss we...” (Laden, “Nah Lef” )
- 4) “If yuh cyaan cook fi mi... If yuh cyaan wash fi mi...” (Chaka Demus & Pliers, “Murder She Wrote”)

The last two modals, quite similar to Standard English, are *woulda* and *coulda*, the examples of which are presented in continuation:

- 1) “Thru di way how dem dress yuh *woulda* think dem a freek” (Frisco Kid, “Living in Style”)
- 2) “...smoke *coulda* be anotha way fi pray di fatha” (VirtuS, “Bun 'till a Morning”).

## Conclusion

Despite the extensive research that has been done on creole languages, the phenomenon of Jamaican Patois still impresses the creolists. Its colonial history has left very important linguistic and cultural marks that distinguish it from other creoles and encourage the promotion of its identity, not only within the Jamaican boundaries, but in the rest of the world as well. It is the constant topic of linguistic and social debates, since the question of its origin, the plurality of its language varieties, and often negative attitudes formed a unique but very complex identity. Finally, it linguistically resulted in lack of concordance in many areas, such as the question of diglossia, linguistic continuum, and orthography. Due to many political efforts, the problem of linguistic stereotypes and negative attitudes has started to change in the last couple of decades. One of the most significant goals of such efforts is to increase bilingual education, and international recognition through the mass media. The most popular and effective method of cultural and language promotion is through the popularization of Jamaican music. From Bob Marley to contemporary artists, such as Sean Paul, Vybz Kartel, Beenie Man and Major Lazer, the rest of the modern world has an opportunity to listen to the contemporary Jamaican speech patterns, as well as introduce itself to the rich African cultural heritage. In this research some of Jamaican Creole's lexical and grammatical features were analyzed, in order to question its proximity to Standard English, as well as verify language attitudes in relation to the linguistic continuum. Consequently, it turns out that Jamaican Creole is by no means a mere dialect of Standard English. It shows certain historical connections in all the three lects of the continuum, however, while the acrolect and the mesolect could be regarded as Standard English varieties, the basilect seems to be a completely different language, with only a slight resemblance to the colonist language. The research observed many mesolectal and acrolectal features from reggae lyrics, but rarely basilectal ones. This is the result of the negative language attitude that only the acrolect is "worth" of broadcasting. Therefore, the reggae songs of dancehall subgenre which is usually identified with sexuality, violence and slack lyrics, show increase in basilectal grammatical and lexical features, as opposed to the rest of the reggae lyrics which are usually written in the mesolect. Finally, hard work has been done on the improvement of Jamaican Creole's status and on the creation of positive linguistic attitudes; however, more research and greater institutional efforts are still indispensable for better future international promotion of Jamaican language and culture, as well as the preservation of its tradition and identity.



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